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## SOME FEATURES OF THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE OF THE SALISH<sup>1</sup>

By CHARLES HILL-TOUT

Of the three great bases of ethnic classification — the physical, the cultural, and the linguistic — no doubt, it seems to me, can remain in the mind of any student of anthropology in this country, of the practical superiority of the latter over the two former.<sup>2</sup> While desiring in no way to disparage or lessen the value of the results obtained by physical and cultural investigation, my own field studies in these directions have convinced me that the only possible classification for American students in the present state of our knowledge is the linguistic.

In saying this I am perfectly well aware that a community of language does not necessarily involve a community of origin. But neither for the matter of that does community of culture, for that can be borrowed and adopted as well as language; and as for a community of physical characteristics I question very seriously if such a thing is possible at this stage of human history. The race that is commonly regarded as the purest in the world — the Hebraic — has been shown to be as physically heterogeneous as many other admittedly mixed races.

From the point of view, then, of homogeneity of race, the linguistic test is as good as the physical or the cultural, and as a practical working basis it is unquestionably the best at our disposal, and the one by which, I believe, the surest results will be obtained in the study of the native races of North America.

Perhaps nowhere on this continent can the correctness of this view be better illustrated than in the study of that diversified and extensive stock known to ethnologists as the Salishan. In their cultural elements and in their physical characteristics these Indians are as diverse as any race could well be, but throughout all this diversity

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<sup>1</sup> Read at the meeting of the American Anthropological Association, San Francisco, August 29.

of culture and somatology there runs a clear and marked uniformity in the basal elements and in the morphological principles of their speech. Indeed this fundamental unity of their language forms one of the most interesting features in the study of this stock. This point becomes the more striking when we remember that the dialectal differences in their language are sometimes very great, greater than those existing in the Romance languages of Europe. But so strongly does this underlying unity manifest itself that when all the dialects of this family shall have been examined I am persuaded it will be possible to reconstruct the primitive Salish tongue as spoken by the original and undivided founders of this stock.

Before I proceed to invite your attention to some of the more interesting results of my studies of this people, I would like to remark incidentally that these primitive tongues are worthy of the highest regard and consideration of philologists and grammarians on account of the light their study incidentally throws on the evolution and development of the formative elements in speech. Being for the most part in an earlier, less developed, and less settled state than the cultivated tongues, they show us in actual operation the processes by which the original, plastic, inchoate elements of speech are converted into instruments of formal thought; how the "parts of speech" became differentiated and restricted in function; how the earlier demonstrative elements are changed into adverbs, prepositions, and pronouns; and how the modal, temporal, and declensional elements are evolved from radicals of independent force and import.

When I was a young man it was one of the axioms of philological science that the numeral and pronominal elements of a language were well-nigh immutable, and that on the similarity or dissimilarity of these might a group of tongues be judged to be or not to be related. But any one familiar with the dialectal differences of our larger linguistic stocks is now well aware of the fallibility of such a test as that which, if applied, for example, to the Salish tongues, would give us instead of one linguistic family or group at least half a dozen. Such tests, it is clear, are applicable only to languages like the Aryan, which reach a certain degree of definiteness in forms before their separation into distinct divisions

takes place. Similarity of lexical forms has been a very useful test in the mapping out of the different linguistic groups of this continent. Our ignorance of the morphology of the primitive languages of this hemisphere left us no other course; but no one who has given attention to the study of the structure of these languages can doubt that, as our knowledge of their organization advances, the number of stocks now recognized will be very materially decreased and that instead of some one hundred and fifty we shall ultimately recognize probably fewer than a fourth of that number. My own examination of these tongues has led me to the conclusion that the differences seen in the morphology of many groups are more superficial than radical, and that beneath an apparent dissimilarity in structure there is an underlying principle of unity running through many of them. For example, the Salish and Kwakiutl tongues are superficially different in their morphology, but when this difference is analyzed it is seen to be one of degree only, not of kind, and is exactly of the same nature as that existing between the various Salish dialects themselves, only in the Kwakiutl it has been carried further and been more deeply affected by foreign influences. And this applies in a greater or lesser degree in all the languages of the Pacific coast north of the Columbia, and I have no doubt that one day the majority of these stocks will be included in one linguistic family.

This however is by the way. It is not so much of language that I desire to speak at this time, though I cannot leave the subject without first calling attention to what has seemed to me a most interesting and suggestive feature of the Salish tongue. And first I would say that I regard the plasticity of these primitive languages as their most marked characteristic. It is a feature they all possess, and is clearly due to the independence and informal character of the elements of language in its earlier stages. A study of such tongues as the Salish would suggest to one that the vocables of primitive speech were very loosely and indefinitely applied; that a large part of their sense and meaning was conveyed not by the words themselves, but by those auxiliaries of early speech — tone and gesture; and that for a long period there was no fixed order or sentence in the words. The same terms according to their order or position were now nouns, now verbs, adverbs, adjectives, or other parts of

speech as the sense required. Most if not all cultivated languages still exhibit this characteristic in a greater or lesser degree. English still retains, or rather has recovered, the power of converting any word into a verb ; and the Chinese, we know, has never gone beyond this early stage. There the function and sense of a word depends entirely on tone and position in the sentence.

The Salish in its present state of development has passed beyond this stage and has arrived at that point where differentiation of the formal parts of speech takes place ; when terms begin to lose their original independence and plasticity of form and are given fixed outlines and functions ; when subsidiary particles are evolved, a settled order and method of verbal synthesis arises, and the morphological principles of the language are firmly established.

But it is abundantly clear from a comparative theory of the numerous Salish dialects that prior to the separation and division of this stock the languages had not reached this stage. The pronominal forms vary radically, with one or two notable exceptions, in every dialect ; and everywhere the forms commonly employed to indicate the third person have still an independent demonstrative force, and in most cases are used in other constructions as simple demonstratives, showing plainly and indisputably thereby the demonstrative origin of pronouns. For even with the other two persons the forms commonly employed have to take, in many instances, a regular demonstrative to give the full force and meaning.

Again, most of the numeral forms differ radically in each of the greater divisions of this stock, whereas in the divisions of the Aryan family the numeral roots are common throughout up to a hundred, I believe. I would not regard this diversity of form in the Salish dialects as indicating that the ancestors of the stock could or did not possess numerals before their separation, but rather as indicating the rudimental informal condition of their language at that time, when ideas of number, like ideas of person, were conveyed in a variety of ways, and when there were but few fixed forms.

Perhaps the most interesting and suggestive example of this unsettled inchoate state of the language before the separation is seen in the use of the temporal elements in verbal construction. These elements in the Salish dialects, unlike those in the classic tongues,

have still for the greater part an independent function. They are primarily locatives or demonstrative adverbs, and are used as such apart from the verb. One of the most constant of these is the term *ne*, and the interesting part about it is that a group of the interior British Columbia tribes employ it to mark future actions and states, while most of the coastal tribes use it to signify past actions and states.

Nothing could illustrate better the plastic, unsettled state of the language prior to the separation of the divisions of this stock than this double and contrary usage of the same radical; and in my earlier studies of this language it puzzled me not a little to account for it. But as soon as its identification with the corresponding demonstrative radix *ne* became clear, it ceased to be a puzzle, but became rather a suggestive illumining ray of light on the obscure processes of savage mentation. This term, as I have said, had and still has an independent locative significance such as is conveyed by our term "there," or "yonder." Now it is clear at once that the border line of time has a "there" on either side of it. The past and the future are, from the standpoint of the present, both *there* or *yonder*; consequently the same term could be employed to mark either a past or a future action or state. And that it was so used by the undivided Salish I have not the least doubt. To this day they regard actions and states as occurring in "place" rather than in "time." It is "here" or "there," not "now" and "then."

I do not venture to say on the strength of the Salish usage of locative elements that the temporal particles in verbal compounds in all language arose in this manner, though I think it highly probable that a great many did. Thus a study of these primitive tongues may, as I have said, throw much light on the development of the formative elements of cultivated languages, the origin of which has become lost or obscured by lapse of time and by the loss of their earlier independent status and function.

Passing now from language to culture, I would like to point out that my studies in this direction have resulted in disclosing an extraordinary diversity in the social institutions, customs, and beliefs of the different Salish tribes. And this diversity is not confined to the larger, more important features of their culture, but extends often-

times to the merest details in the minor issues of their lives. As an illustration of this I may cite the differences in their mortuary, marriage, puberty, birth, and naming customs. I have called attention to these differences from time to time in my reports on the Salish,<sup>1</sup> but I may mention one or two of them here. Thus one feature of the mortuary ceremony is the severing of the hair of the surviving relatives of the deceased. This is the conventional sign of mourning with them; and while all the tribes practise this not uncommon rite among primitive peoples, no two of them, so far as my observations go, treat or deal with the severed hair in the same manner. This may seem a small and unimportant point; but the difference of treatment reveals a fundamental difference in their conceptions and ideas which appears to me to be most interesting. Thus in one group they dispose of the hair by burning it so that it may not be used by an enemy to bewitch them; in another they take it away and bury it in some spot outside the camp where the vegetation is vigorous and dense, insuring thereby to the owners long life and strength; in another they put it away carefully to be buried with their corpses at death; in another it is cast into running water, and in still another it is taken into the forest and fastened on the branches of the mystic red-fir tree, always on its eastern side; and doubtless in other divisions they have still other practices.

It is the same in puberty rites. No two groups follow the same customs. The place and period of seclusion vary apparently in every tribe. Some build little cubicles within the dwellings over the general sleeping platform, wherein both boys and girls are separately secluded for a period of ten days; others construct special shelters outside, wherein only the girls are secluded for a period of time differing in each division; others again make their pubescent children retire to the forest, some for a short period and some for six months or a year. In some tribes the shamans play an important part in the rites; in others the elders take charge of the pubescents, instructing them generally in the various duties and responsibilities of manhood and womanhood. Among the interior tribes every pubescent boy and girl during his or her period of seclusion or training acquires a personal totem, but among the delta and coastal

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<sup>1</sup> See the publications of the Ethnological Survey of Canada.

tribes girls do not customarily acquire totems at all; and only those youths who have a desire to excel in some special pursuit seek and acquire personal guardian spirits. These are but a few instances of the minor differences; numerous others may be found in my various reports on this stock.

Of the wider differences in their culture, some of the more important are those relating to their social institutions. With respect to these, if we may take simplicity of social forms as indicating the earlier stages in the cultural development of a people, then the simple organization of the interior tribes, of which the Thompson Indians afford a fair example, may be regarded as representing most nearly the earlier culture of the Salishan stock. From this point, as we approach the coastal tribes, we find an increasing complexity in social structure and an ever-widening divergence in customs, practices, and beliefs.

Many of these differences, both greater and minor, are doubtless due to difference in habitat. The interior tribes inhabit a dry region, those on the coast the very opposite, precipitation being frequent and often excessive with them. The climate here is also milder in winter than in the interior, and this fact alone would account for the main difference in their dress and dwellings. The wide variability in the physical characteristics of the race, however, show plainly, too, that some of their diversity of culture is due to race-admixture; doubtless some is also due to the influx of new ideas from contiguous stocks, but more I think is the result of spontaneous independent cultural development.

Among the interior tribes the office of chieftain is elective and the conduct of affairs is mainly in the hands of the elders of the tribe. When we reach the Lillooet and the Halkōmā'lem divisions we find that this office, though still elective in theory, has become practically hereditary; and when we come to the coastal Salish we find that the chieftaincy descends regularly from father to son and has been held by the same family for as many generations as they have any record of.

The earlier, simpler forms of social organization show a state of democratic equality and independence existing which amounts to what one may denominate as pure anarchy. From this condition



of things to that obtaining among the coastal tribes is a far cry. Here we find the chiefs hereditary, a princely caste established, and the rest of the tribe divided into nobles and base folk, the former possessing and enjoying exclusive rights and privileges.

But the most important changes that have taken place in the culture of the delta and coastal tribes are those, in my opinion, relating to totemic ideas and conceptions. And here I shall make some little digression in order that I may the better illustrate the importance of my studies in this direction.

As most of us probably are aware, the subject of totemism does not loom so large in anthropological inquiry in this country as in Europe, and particularly in England. There, no question has of late years had so much attention given to it as totemism, and views are commonly held regarding its origin and import which are radically different from those generally held by students in this country. Our studies of the subject have led most of us to regard totemism as primarily a religious institution or manifestation, the inevitable outcome of savage man's attitude toward nature, the social aspects of which are something very secondary and incidental, and which attained such importance as they possess in savage regimentation because of their obvious convenience in classifying and distinguishing one kin-group from another.

But this is not the view taken by European students. Totemism with them is primarily and essentially a social institution originating in and properly belonging to the matriarchal state of society and constituting at once the cause and basis of clan organization. Furthermore, they commonly regard personal totemism — which to them is a contradiction in terms — as something distinct altogether from group totemism, or at most a later derivative phase of it.

Such a view of the matter is as perplexing to us as our views are to them. To us the personal totem precedes the group totem and is the source and origin of it. Moreover, we do not find that group totemism is a peculiarity of tribes organized on a matriarchal basis. It is as characteristic of the patriarchal and the village state as of the matriarchal in this country; and that it may originate in a state of society other than the matriarchal I think is clear beyond the shadow of a doubt from the evidence I have gathered among

the Salish, whose organization, as you are aware, is that of the village commune.

There is something equally common and equally essential to the totemism of the village Salish, the patrilineal Sioux, and the matrilineal Haida. This obviously is not its social characteristics, for these three stocks have different social organizations; but it is its religious character, for all three hold and share alike the common belief in tutelary spirits, which belief is seen to lie at the base of and to give life and meaning equally to the totemism of each. Ethnological study here has made it perfectly clear that totemism prevails in one form or another in all our American tribes; and it has further revealed the fact that its social aspects vary with the social organization of the different stocks or groups. Among all the personal or individual totem or tutelary spirit is in evidence. Indeed it is the very prevalence of the personal totem — the *nagual*, *manitou*, *sulia*, *snam*, *wahabe*, or whatever it may locally be called — that has led those of us who have made a first-hand study of the subject to regard group totemism as a natural extension and development under social requirements of personal totemism. And just here is where the totemism of the Salish becomes interesting and suggestive. Everywhere amongst them we find the personal totem in vogue; and the evidence I have been able to gather on this head makes it perfectly clear, in my judgment, that the group totemism we find among them is a development of their personal totemism. For in the tribes of the interior, where group totems, so far as we have been able to discover, are wholly unknown, *every* individual of both sexes is said to possess his or her personal totem; and it is only when we come to those divisions which possess group and hereditary totems — which are everywhere demonstrably later developments of the personal totem — that we find the personal totem less common and possessed by certain members of the tribe only. In those tribes where the kin or family totems are common, the personal totem is comparatively rare. This state of things points conclusively, to my mind, to the supersedure of the personal totem by the kin or group totem because of the changes that have taken place in the social organization of these tribes. For among all the tribes possessing group or kin totems we find prevailing a social

system different from that obtaining among those tribes that possess the personal totem only. Wherever the group totems prevail we find hereditary chiefs and distinct castes, medicine and secret societies, family and kin crests, and such like social features, all or most of which find their support and have their rise in the group or fraternal totem.

A study of the kin or group totems of the delta and coastal Salish makes this very clear. As long as the totem is personal and personally acquired, it is always regarded as an ever-ready, active, ghostly helper to be called on in all emergencies; but when it becomes by inheritance a group or kin totem, we find it losing its active tutelary character and degenerating into what is little more than a family crest or symbol of kinship. And this is entirely in line with the nature of the kin or group totems of the Haida, Tsimshian, and other matrilineal peoples.

The totemism, then, of the Salish, besides being extremely interesting in itself, is of interest and value also in confirming the views commonly held by students of this country, and leaves no room for doubt that the group or kin totem is at any rate here a development of the earlier personal totem.

But there is another phase of the question, which is perhaps the most interesting of all, where Salish evidence is also helpful and suggestive. Students of totemism early saw that a deep and vital connection lay between the doctrine or institution of totemism and the system of savage names. In this country the late Director of the Bureau of American Ethnology went so far as to define totemism as the "doctrine of naming," being led to take this view of the matter by the close and intimate relation he perceived to exist between names of persons and groups and the names of the totem objects of these persons and groups. As he pointed out, and as Miss Alice C. Fletcher had pointed out earlier (and to her is, I think, due the credit of first recognizing the importance and the deep significance of names among the native races of this country), the names among primitive races are very different from names among sophisticated peoples. They are not with them, as customarily with us, mere labels or vocal tags to distinguish one person or group from another; they are rather terms of relation and affiliation having

a sacred and mystic import and are considered to be as much a part and parcel of the object bearing them as any portion or characteristic of the object itself ; and I am aware of nothing more important, suggestive, and interesting in our studies of primitive culture than this same study of names. Indeed, so important have I been led by my own studies to regard this question that I have ventured to suggest in my last report that it be treated as a separate department of anthropological study under the term *nomenclology* ; and nothing, I am convinced, will be found to be more profitable and instructive than inquiry along these lines.

I was unusually fortunate in my last year's field work in procuring from an elderly Indian a body of information bearing on the name systems of the Salish, which, while highly interesting in itself, helps us to understand how the primitive mind regards names generally. This information, which I have given in detail, will appear in my next report.

In the study of primitive man the greatest difficulty the sophisticated student has to contend with, I have found, is the essential difference of his own from his subject's plane of thought — in other words, the difficulty to see things from the native point of view. He can make no satisfactory advance till he has emptied his mind of all its preconceptions regarding primitive man, which more often than not are founded on early misconceptions and limited knowledge of his life and thought. We have been studying the savage more or less systematically for a quarter of a century now, yet I am convinced we are but just beginning to know and to understand him as he really is. Speaking for myself, I would like to say that I have found nothing so helpful to me in getting behind his eyes and beholding the universe from his view-point as the study of his names and name systems.

I may be permitted to observe here that it is a phase of his culture not confined to the primitive races of this continent, but to be met with, I believe, wherever unsophisticated man is to be found. This also is a point we have but just discovered. Until the publication of Spencer and Gillen's works on the tribes of central Australia we had no sure knowledge that the primitive races of other countries regarded their personal and group names in the same light

as do our own aborigines. In their work on the "Northern Tribes of Central Australia" Messrs Spencer and Gillen have devoted a chapter to names, and although the information they obtained on this subject is general rather than particular, it leaves no room for doubt that the Australian savage holds views on the "doctrine of naming" fundamentally identical with those held by our own Indians; and thus, when two peoples so physically dissimilar and so widely separated as the black fellows of Australia and the Indians of America are found holding practically identical views on this subject, we are not unjustified in assuming, I think, that we are dealing with some fundamental universal concept of the primitive mind, a concept that has entered deeply into both their religious and social life.

It may be of interest to remark here that while European students have recognized with ourselves the close connection that exists between primitive names and totemism, they do not view this connection from our point of view. Rejecting personal totemism as the basis and origin of group-totemism, they are debarred from looking for the origin of totem-group names in the personal totem names of some of the ancestors of the groups or kins as we are naturally led, and as the evidence directs us, to do. They have to account for these names in some other way. Within the last two years two different theories of the origin of totem-group names have been put forth by two eminent European anthropologists — one by Dr Haddon, the other by Mr Andrew Lang. Both theories suppose these names to come from without the groups bearing them; the former suggesting that they arose from the names of the characteristic foods of primitive human groups. Thus those living along the shores and those who lived in the jungle would subsist in the main on different foods, the one, say, on crabs and the other on sago. These staples of their larder they would sometimes exchange, and the one group would come in time to be spoken of as the "Crab-men" and the other as the "Sago-men." Presently each group would recognize the appropriateness of the term as applied to themselves and would adopt it as their group name. Later their descendants, when its true origin had been lost, would begin to look upon themselves as related to the animal or vegetable or other ob-

ject whose names they bore, and create myths to account for this relationship. Thus would arise both the group-totem and the group name. This, very briefly expressed, is Dr Haddon's theory. Mr Lang's is not greatly unlike it. He is not wedded to any particular view as to the manner in which the name arises, provided only that it comes from *without* the group bearing it. This is an essential feature of his theory. It may arise, as Dr Haddon suggests, from nicknames, or in any other way. On the whole he favors the nickname origin himself and offers some interesting information on the origin of village nicknames as found in England and on the continent of Europe. But, however it arises, those to whom it is applied come in time to adopt it and regard it as peculiarly their own. Later, as in Dr Haddon's theory, when the true origin of the name has been forgotten, a mythical origin is given to it and the object from which the name is taken is held to be related to the group and becomes the group totem and the source of the group name.

I have elsewhere recorded the objection which arises in my mind against these theories.<sup>1</sup> I will only say here that both these views of the origin of totem-group names wholly neglect to recognize the deep inner meaning names have in the mind of primitive man, and conflict with the data on this head which I have gathered from the Salish and which Messrs Spencer and Gillen obtained from the Australians.

We know beyond question that the source of personal names among many American tribes is the personal totem, and it would appear to be the same in Australia. Among the interior Salish tribes the personal totem is the commonest source of the personal name. We know, too, that the personal totem can be transmitted and become an hereditary family or kin totem. What, then, is more reasonable than to conclude that the totem-group name is the transmitted totem name of the founder, or of some other prominent ancestor, of the group, as the Indians themselves believe?

Whether my exposition of Salish culture, and particularly my presentation of the data bearing on totemism, will persuade our

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<sup>1</sup> Totemism: A consideration of its Origin and Import; *Trans. Royal Society of Canada*, Second series, vol. IX, sec. II, 1903-04.

European colleagues to accept the American view, I cannot say ; but I trust this short account of my studies has made it clear that the field of ethnological inquiry offered by the various divisions of the Salish is one of the most interesting and instructive to which we can devote attention.

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